

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAJ-01 ACDA-05

SAM-01 /065 W

----- 001190

R 301409Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1795

INFO SECDEF WASHDC

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USNMR SHAPE

AMEMBASSY LISBON

CINC EUR VAIHINGEN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BONN 12283

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: GW, NATO, PO

SUBJECT: FRG PLANS TO RETAIN AIR BASE IN PORTUGAL

BEGIN SUMMARY: THROUGH AN UNEXPECTED PRESS LEAK, IT WAS ALLEGED BY SEVERAL GERMAN NEWSPAPERS LAST WEEK THAT THE FRG INTENDED TO VACATE ITS AIR FORCE BASE AT BEJA, PORTUGAL, BECAUSE OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE COUNTRY. HOWEVER, THIS INFORMATION WAS QUICKLY REPUDIATED AT THE INSTANCE OF THE FONOFF WHICH WANTED TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE FRG WOULD MAINTAIN A STABLE PRESENCE IN PORTUGAL DURING THIS PERIOD OF POLITICAL TURBULENCE. END SUMMARY.

1. SEVERAL ARTICLES APPEARED IN THE GERMAN PRESS ON JULY 25 CONCERNING THE POSSIBLE EVACUATION BY THE GERMANS OF THEIR AIR FORCE BASE LOCATED AT BEJA, PORTUGAL. THE STORIES RESULTED FROM COMMENTS REPORTEDLY MADE BY FMOD STATE SECRETARY FINGERHUT AT WHAT WAS THOUGHT TO BE A CLOSED DEFENSE DISCUSSION GROUP MEETING IN BONN. HOWEVER, FINGERHUT'S REMARKS
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WERE LEAKED TO THE PRESS, WITH THE STORIES ALLEGING

THAT HE HAD STATED THE FRG WOULD MOST PROBABLY GIVE UP BEJA BECAUSE OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN PORTUGAL. THEY CONTINUED THAT THE PORTUGUESE HAD BROUGHT PRESSURE ON THE FMOD TO PERMIT THE STATIONING OF A PARATROOP BATTALION ON THE BASE IN CONTRAVENTION OF THE GERMAN-PORTUGUESE TREATY. FINGERHUT WAS QUOTED FURTHER AS HAVING SAID THAT THE PARATROOP BATTALION WAS "NOT RELIABLE POLITICALLY," I.E., IT WAS ANTI-COMMUNIST AND CERTAIN OFFICIALS WANTED IT SENT OUTSIDE LISBON.

2. FOLLOWING THE APPEARANCE OF THESE STORIES, THE FMOD ISSUED A STATEMENT CHARACTERIZING AS INACCURATE REPORTS THAT THE BUNDESWEHR INTENDED TO GIVE UP THE BASE. THE STATEMENT CONTINUED THAT THE GOP PLAN TO TRANSFER THE PARATROOP BATTALION TO BEJA WOULD CHANGE THE BASIS OF THE TREATY, AND THIS HAS BEEN MADE CLEAR TO THE PORTUGUESE. THE TREATY IS VALID UNTIL 1978 AND THE FRG IS ANXIOUS TO OBSERVE IT, BUT THE SAME MUST BE EXPECTED OF LISBON.

3. THE FRG HAS USED BEJA SINCE THE MID-1960'S WHEN NATO PARTNER PORTUGAL PLACED IT AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE GERMAN AIR FORCE (GAF) AS A TRAINING BASE FOR PILOTS. HOWEVER, THE FRG NEVER UTILIZED THE BASE TO ANY GREAT EXTENT, AND AT THE PRESENT TIME ONLY APPROXIMATELY 150 BUNDESWEHR MEMBERS -- SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS -- ARE STATIONED THERE. THE BASE SERVES PRINCIPALLY AS AN OCCASIONAL FUELING STOP FOR GERMAN AIRCRAFT. THE BASE REPRESENTS A SUBSTANTIAL FINANCIAL DRAIN ON THE GAF BUDGET ALLOCATION, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE BASE IS NOT CONSIDERED COST EFFECTIVE.

4. COMMENT: FINGERHUT'S ALLEGED STATEMENTS AND THE FMOD'S QUICK REINTERPRETATION OF HIS REMARKS ILLUSTRATE SOME BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS BETWEEN FMOD AND THE FONOFF REGARDING THE STATUS OF THE BASE. FINGERHUT'S STATEMENTS PROBABLY REFLECT THE DESIRE OF THE GAF TO DIVEST ITSELF OF THE BASE TO USE THE MONIES SAVED FOR OTHER PURPOSES, SINCE FINGERHUT HIMSELF IS RESPONSIBLE FOR BUNDESWEHR INSTALLATIONS.

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HOWEVER, THE FONOFF IS MORE CONCERNED ABOUT GIVING THE APPEARANCE OF MAINTAINING A STABLE FRG PRESENCE IN PORTUGAL DURING THE CURRENT TURBULENT POLITICAL SITUATION. THEREFORE, FINGERHUT WAS OVERRULED AND A RELIABLE FONOFF OFFICIAL INFORMED US ON JULY 28 THAT THE FRG HAS NOT TAKEN ANY DECISION TO CHANGE THE STATUS OF THE BASE. IT IS EXPECTED, HOWEVER, THAT A GERMAN-PORTUGUESE WORKING GROUP WILL MEET IN THE FALL TO

DISCUSS THE STATIONING ISSUE AGAIN. END COMMENT.
HILLENBRAND

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, MILITARY BASES, POLITICAL SITUATION, NEWS LEAKS, EVACUATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 JUL 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BONN12283
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750263-0149
From: BONN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t1975075/aaaaaemf.tel
Line Count: 117
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24 APR 2003 by SmithRJ>; APPROVED <28 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FRG PLANS TO RETAIN AIR BASE IN PORTUGAL BEGIN SUMMARY: THROUGH AN UNEXPECTED PRESS LEAK, IT
TAGS: PFOR, MILI, GE, PO, NATO
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006